

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 SS-15 HA-05 NSCE-00 PM-05

INR-10 INRE-00 SP-02 /048 W

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FM AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1439

INFO AMEMBASSY COTONOU IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L LIBREVILLE 2077

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS:PINT, PEVR, GB, DM

SUBJECT: REQUEST TO TRANSPORT BENINESE

REF:A) LIBREVILLE 2076, B) STATE 191856, C) STATE 189801

1. DURING MEETING THIS MORNING, FONMIN BONGO REPEATED HIS REQUEST FOR US ASSISTANCE IN TRANSPORTING BENINESE TO COTONOU. HE SAID THAT THERE ABOUT 7000 BENINESE INVOLVED AND WHAT HE HOPED FOR WAS LARGE TRANSPORT AIRCRAFT. APPEAL WAS PREFACED BY HISTORICAL REFERENCE TO EVENTS IN COTONOU LAST YEAR AND KEREKOU'S ATTACK ON BONGO AT KHARTOUM. ON THESE POINTS, HE ADDED NOTHING NEW BUT MADE SURE TO DENY THAT ANY DC-7 CARRYING MERCENARIES EVER FLEW TO COTONOU FROM FRANCEVILLE, INSISTING THAT AREA AIR CONTROL IN BRAZZAVILLE WOULD HAVE RECORDED ANY FLIGHT HAD IT OCCURRED.

2. HE SAID PROBLEM WAS THAT THEY COULD NOT USE OWN AIRCRAFT TO FLY TO COTONOU BECAUSE THEY WOULD NOT GET THEM BACK. HE CONFIRMED STORY WE HAD HEARD YESTERDAY (LIBREVILLE 2075) THAT SPECIAL EMISSARY HAD BEEN TURNED DOWN BY TOGOLESE IN EFFORT TO ARRANGE FOR REFUGEES TO LAND AT LOME AND HAVE THEM TRANSPORTED OVERLAND TO BENIN. ASKED IF GABONESE HAD APPROACHED ANYONE ELSE FOR HELP INCLUDING UNHCR, BONGO SAID THEY HAVE ASKED FRENCH FOR ASSISTANCE WITH SHIPS AND APPEALED BOTH TO UNHCR AND INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS.

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THEY HAVE NO ANSWERS YET.

3. INASMUCH AS I HAD TOLD HIM YESTERDAY THAT I WOULD NEED MORE DETAILS AND THEN WOULD FORWARD REQUEST TO WASHINGTON, I DID NOT TELL HIM WE DID NOT WISH BE INVOLVED. I DID, HOWEVER, REMIND HIM OF USC'S STRONG SUPPORT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AS MATTER OF GLOBAL POLICY, NOTING THAT THERE WERE HUMAN RIGHTS REQUIREMENTS IN

MANY OF OUR PIECES OF LEGISLATION THAT CAME INTO PLAY IN OUR RELATIONS WITH OTHER COUNTRIES, TOLD HIM THAT WHILE BENINESE AFFAIR WAS NOT OUR BUSINESS, WE WERE IN FACT CONCERNED ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS ASPECTS AND I FELT SURE THAT IF THERE WERE A SUDDEN, MASS EVACUATION THERE COULD BE BAD REACTION IN WASHINGTON, AND FINALLY THAT I WAS QUITE SURE WASHINGTON WOULD TAKE THIS ASPECT STRONGLY INTO CONSIDERATION IN FORMULATING ITS REPLY. HE NODDED, BUT MADE NO COMMENT.

4. ACTION REQUESTED: IN VIEW OF CIRCUMSTANCES, I FELT IT BETTER TO LEAVE IMPRESSION THAT OUR CONSIDERATION OF GABONESE REQUEST WOULD TAKE A LITTLE TIME. I THEREFORE PROPOSE TO GO BACK TO HIM EARLY NEXT WEEK WITH DEFINITIVE REPLY PER REFTEL (B). GROUNDWORK FOR REFUSAL ON HUMAN RIGHTS GROUNDS HAS BEEN LAID AND I CAN NOW LEAN ON IT HEAVILY, BUT I WOULD HOPE TO COUPLE IT WITH SUCH OTHER REASONS AS DESIRE NOT TO BECOME INVOLVED IN MATTERS OF THIS KIND BETWEEN TWO AFRICAN STATES, OUR LONGSTANDING PRINCIPLE THAT AFRICANS SHOULD RESOLVE THEIR OWN PROBLEM , PROBLEMS OF COST, AND SHEER IMPRACTICABILITY OF FURNISHING KIND OF AIRLIFT THAT WOULD BE REQUIRED. I RECOGNIZE THERE MAY BE COMPELLING REASONS TO DENY THEM AIRLIFT HELP ON HUMAN RIGHTS GROUNDS ALONE,BUT IT SEEMS TO ME WE HAVE NOW MADE CLEAR OUR CONCERN AND THAT TO BASE OUR ANSWER ONLY ON HUMAN RIGHTS WOULD BE TO OVERSTRESS THAT CONCERN. I WOULD APPRECIATE DEPARTMENTS THOUGHTS BY MONDAY JULY 31. TIENKEN

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